

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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R 010820Z APR 77
FM AMEMBASSY ROME
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3737

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 ROME 5364

FOR ASSISTANT SECRETARY HARTMAN FROM AMBASSADOR

E. O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, IT
SUBJ: VISIT TO US OF SOCIALIST PARTY SECRETARY

1. SUMMARY. BENEDETTO CRAXI, THE INTERNATIONALLY-ORIENTED SECRETARY OF THE ITALIAN SOCIALIST PARTY (PSI) WHO REPRESENTS HIS PARTY'S NEW GENERATION, HOPES TO VISIT THE US DURING LATE MAY OR EARLY JUNE IN ORDER TO GATHER FIRST-HAND IMPRESSIONS OF AMERICAN ATTITUDES TOWARD ITALY AND TO EXPLAIN PSI POSITIONS TO US OPINION MAKERS. CRAXI ATTACHES GREAT IMPORTANCE TO SEEING PRESIDENT CARTER, IF ONLY FOR A FEW MINUTES, DURING THIS VISIT. I STRONGLY RECOMMEND THAT A BRIEF COURTESY CALL BE SCHEDULED IN ORDER TO ENHANCE CRAXI'S PRESTIGE AND HELP HIM IN HIS EFFORTS TO REJUVENATE THE PSI AND ESTABLISH SOCIALIST INDEPENDENCE FROM THE ITALIAN COMMUNIST PARTY (PCI). ACTION REQUESTED: A DECISION IN PRINCIPLE ON WHETHER THE PRESIDENT AND OTHERS WILL SEE CRAXI. END SUMMARY.

2. CRAXI WAS CHOSEN AS SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE PSI FOLLOWING ITS UNSUCCESSFUL JUNE 1976 ELECTION EFFORT. SINCE THEN, HE HAS WORKED HARD TO REJUVENATE THE PSI'S LEADERSHIP AND TO PUT THE PARTY ON A COURSE INDEPENDENT OF THE PCI. HIS EFFORTS HAVE BEEN HAMPERED BY POLICY
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DIFFERENCES AMONG SOCIALIST LEADERS AND BY THE INFLUENCE OF FACTIONS AND PERSONAL FIEFDOMS WITHIN THE PARTY. A STRONG, ALMOST VISCERAL, ANTI-COMMUNIST HIMSELF, CRAXI MUST LIVE WITH THE PARTY PLATFORM WHICH HE INHERITED AND WHICH INCLUDES A CALL FOR AN "ALTERNATIVE OF THE LEFT" -- ESSENTIALLY A COALITION GOVERNMENT WITH THE PCI. LACKING THE STRENGTH TO CONFRONT THE PRO-

COMMUNISTS WITHIN HIS PARTY DIRECTLY, CRAXI HAS SOUGHT TO GAIN TIME AND LEVERAGE THROUGH A SERIES OF COMPROMISES. AT THE SAME TIME, HE HAS EXPANDED CONTACTS WITH OTHER WESTERN EUROPEAN SOCIALIST AND SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC PARTIES IN ORDER TO PROPOSE EUROSOCIALISM AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO EUROCOMMUNISM IN THE ITALIAN CONTEXT. HE HAS PUBLICLY POINTED OUT THE SHORTCOMINGS OF WORLD COMMUNISM, ESPECIALLY IN CASES WHERE HUMAN RIGHTS HAVE BEEN VIOLATED. HE HAS ESTABLISHED A STRONG AND MORE INDEPENDENT SOCIALIST PRESENCE IN THE LABOR UNION MOVEMENT. ALL THESE ACTIVITIES POINT TOWARD CONVINCING THE PARTY LEADERSHIP AND RANK-AND-FILE THAT A DEMOCRATIC SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE IN ITALY CANNOT BE ACHIEVED THROUGH AN ALLIANCE DOMINATED BY THE PCI.

3. DESPITE THEIR INTERNAL DIVISIONS AND UNDENIABLE SHORTCOMINGS, THE SOCIALISTS WILL CONTINUE TO PLAY A KEY ROLE IN ITALIAN POLITICS. THEIR ASSENT IS CRUCIAL TO THE FORMATION OF ANY GOVERNMENT, AND PROSPECTS FOR THE EVENTUAL CONSTITUTION OF A GOVERNMENT NOT DEPENDENT UPON THE PCI HANG UPON SOCIALIST ATTITUDES. AT PRESENT, IT IS CLEAR THAT THE SOCIALISTS WILL NOT IN THE SHORT RUN BE ABLE TO AGREE TO ANY GOVERNMENT NOT ALSO SUPPORTED BY THE PCI. THE OUTCOME OF THE STRUGGLE TO DETERMINE THE PSI'S ORIENTATION OVER THE LONGER TERM, HOWEVER, IS STILL IN DOUBT, AND IT IS VERY MUCH IN THE INTERESTS OF THE US TO ENCOURAGE THOSE SOCIALISTS WHO WOULD STEER THE PARTY TOWARD CHOICES THAT WOULD FAVOR TRUE DEMOCRACY IN ITALY. CRAXI
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IS THE ONE FIGURE ON THE SOCIALIST HORIZON WITH BOTH THE CONVICTIONS AND THE ABILITY TO DIRECT THE PARTY ALONG THOSE LINES.

4. IN ADDITION TO ENHANCING CRAXI'S PRESTIGE, A MEETING WITH THE PRESIDENT WOULD HIGHLIGHT CRAXI'S PRO-WESTERN CREDENTIALS. CRAXI HAS PLACED THE PSI IN THE VANGUARD OF THE MOVEMENT TO DEFEND HUMAN RIGHTS, ESPECIALLY WITH REGARD TO SOVIET AND EASTERN EUROPEAN REPRESSION OF POLITICAL DISSENT. TO A STRIKING DEGREE, THE SOCIALISTS' STANDS ON HUMAN RIGHTS HAVE COINCIDED WITH THE POSITIONS TAKEN BY THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION. IN CONTRAST, THE PCI'S RECORD IN THE HUMAN RIGHTS AREA HAS BEEN INCONSISTENT AT BEST. THIS SITUATION CREATES AN OPENING FOR CRAXI'S EFFORTS TO STRENGTHEN THE PSI BY WINNING THE SUPPORT OF THOSE WHO IN RECENT YEARS HAVE BEEN INFLUENCED BY THE PCI'S CLAIMS TO DEMOCRATIC CREDENTIALS. A MEETING WITH PRESIDENT CARTER WOULD REINFORCE CRAXI'S EFFORTS AND HELP

HIM TO EXPLOIT THIS OPENING.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 ROME 5364

5. DURING A BRIEF ENCOUNTER WITH CRAXI, THE PRESIDENT
COULD MAKE CLEAR THE US PREFERENCE FOR MAINTAINING
WESTERN DEMOCRATIC GOVERNMENT IN ITALY, AND HE COULD
ALSO ENCOURAGE THE PSI TO PLAY A CONSTRUCTIVE ROLE IN
THIS REGARD. THE ENORMOUS PRESTIGE OF THE PRESIDENT
WOULD ACCORD GREAT WEIGHT TO SUCH EXPRESSIONS.

6. CRAXI OF COURSE REALIZES THAT TREMENDOUS DEMANDS
UPON THE PRESIDENT'S TIME EXIST, AND HE IS WILLING
TO PLAN HIS TRIP AROUND THE APPOINTMENT WITH THE
PRESIDENT. IN ADDITION TO THE FEW MINUTES WITH THE
PRESIDENT, CRAXI WISHES TO HAVE LONGER OPPORTUNITIES
TO EXCHANGE VIEWS WITH THE SECRETARY, CONGRESSIONAL LEADERS
CONCERNED WITH ITALIAN AFFAIRS, AND WITH YOU. CRAXI'S STAY IN THE
US, WHICH WILL BE UP TO ONE WEEK LONG, WILL PROBABLY ALSO
INCLUDE SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS BEFORE UNIVERSITY OR
FOREIGN AFFAIRS INTEREST GROUP AUDIENCES. THESE
OCCASIONS WILL BE ARRANGED DIRECTLY BY THE PSI THROUGH
US CONTACTS.

7. ACTION REQUESTED: IN ORDER THAT DETAILED PLANNING
FOR THE CRAXI VISIT MAY COMMENCE, IT IS ESSENTIAL TO
KNOW WHETHER IN PRINCIPLE THE PRESIDENT WOULD BE PRE-
PARED TO RECEIVE CRAXI. IF HE WOULD DO SO, DURING
WHAT TIME FRAME SHOULD CRAXI PLAN TO BE IN THE
UNITED STATES? FINALLY, WOULD APPOINTMENTS WITH
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SECRETARY VANCE AND YOU ALSO BE POTENTIALLY POSSIBLE DURING
THE VISIT?GARDNER

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Message Attributes

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